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MONITORING OF INTERNATIONAL PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION

Major issues and programme activities of the United Nations Secretariat and the regional commissions relating to social development and welfare and specific social groups

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Social welfare and social development activities of the regional commissions for the biennium 1993-1994

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I. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

A. Social development and welfare

1. Although the Economic Commission for Europe does not have a mandate related to social development, it has applied an interdisciplinary approach in following the macroeconomic trends within the region, putting special emphasis on employment and the social consequences of processes related to the transition to a market economy. A similar approach has also been followed in the sectoral work of the Commission related to statistics, population, environment, trade, industry, energy and agriculture.

2. The Statistical Division is engaged in several activities which, although not directly related to social development issues, nevertheless could be relevant to different aspects of social development. One is in the field of population and housing censuses. Every 10 years the secretariat prepares a new set of recommendations for countries in the region for the next round of censuses, and it is currently working to prepare the set for the year-2000 round. This activity is important because population censuses provide benchmark data on many different topics, information which is needed to develop national and regional social policies.

3. The Division has also been appointed as the executing agency for a new, UNDP-financed project which is intended to help countries in the region with economies in transition to develop a wide range of social statistics. Although the project is currently in its initial stages, it is anticipated that during the course of the next three years it will be instrumental in improving the capacities of those countries to develop improved social statistics.

4. Another activity is the special publication on statistics of women and men in the region, which is almost completed. The publication is expected to be available in time to serve as a special contribution to the World Conference on Women at Beijing. It will contain a range of data on the situation of women and men in countries of the region, and many of those data will likely be very relevant for social development issues.

B. Youth

5. In 1992, the Population Activities Unit initiated a project called "Fertility and family surveys in countries of the United Nations/ECE region". The surveys are being conducted on the basis of a common questionnaire containing various retrospective questions on different life course events, such as making decisions about education and occupation, choosing partners, and having children. Although in most participating countries interviews are conducted with men and women aged 20 years and over, the retrospective questions will allow for the study of the effects of various social and economic conditions on the life experiences of individuals during youth and adolescence. Some of the research themes to be prepared from the data are: differential change in attitudes and behaviour concerned with leaving home, and family dissolution and its effects on the next generation.

6. By the end of 1995, 16 countries participating in the project are expected to have completed their field work. The countries are: Belgium, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America. Several other countries in Europe support the project and may join at a later date. The Population Activities Unit is currently processing data files at Geneva and creating standardized tabulations to ensure that the data are internationally comparable, of high quality and accessible to researchers. Following this process, individual country studies will be written by national experts, and a selected group of scholars will produce comparative country studies to provide more detail and indicate the implications for policy.

C. Ageing

7. In 1992, in order to study the social and economic conditions of older persons in Europe and North America, the Population Activities Unit initiated a project entitled "The dynamics of population ageing in ECE countries". The two main objectives of the project are to assemble a set of cross-nationally comparable depersonalized micro data sets based on the 1990 round of national population and housing censuses and to use those data to study the social and economic conditions of older persons in selected countries. Research themes to be studied from the data are: main facts and trends in vital events and population structures; social, economic and demographic characteristics of older persons who are institutionalized (and comparisons with those who are not institutionalized); the living arrangements of older persons; older persons' labour-force participation status; and their economic conditions, mobility patterns and spatial distribution.

8. To date, the following 13 countries have indicated an interest in participating in the project: Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Turkey, Switzerland and the United States of America. In addition, four countries have expressed an interest in participating after certain concerns have been addressed: Canada, Poland, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Several other countries in Europe support the project and may join at a later date. The Population Activities Unit is currently processing data files at Geneva and creating standardized tabulations to ensure that the data are internationally comparable, of high quality and accessible to researchers. Following this process, individual country studies will be written by national experts, and a selected group of scholars will produce comparative country studies to provide more detail and indicate the implications for policy.

9. Taking into account current population trends which indicate that the region is the only one with a predominately ageing population, the secretariat contributed to the preparatory process for the World Summit for Social Development by convening the Workshop on Population Ageing in Europe and North America: A Message for the World Summit for Social Development (Geneva, 13-14 February 1995). The workshop was organized jointly by the secretariat and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), with financial support from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. Other United Nations bodies and agencies - in particular, the World Health Organization - participated.

10. The purpose of the workshop was to consider policy responses to population ageing in Europe and North America. Particular emphasis was given to the main themes of the World Summit for Social Development: poverty, employment, and social integration. Figuring prominently on the agenda was an analysis of current and future trends in population ageing in the region, including subregional variations, public and private responses to the issue, income security schemes and participation of older persons in economic and social life. The report and messages emanating from the workshop were made available and widely circulated during the Social Summit.

11. The Commission is also concerned with rehabilitation engineering, which is of relevance for older persons. A United Nations publication on the topic was recently issued (Sales No. E.94.II.E.17).

II. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

A. Social development and welfare

12. High levels of economic growth in many countries of Asia and the Pacific during the past several decades have contributed to a broad-based pattern of social progress throughout much of the region. Progress has come about both directly as a result of economic growth and indirectly through strengthened governmental interventions which tend to accompany heightened sensitivity to social concerns in the presence of sustained economic growth. Increased per capita incomes have enhanced access to goods and services and to a better quality of life for large numbers of people. With greater public revenues, Governments, increasingly in collaboration with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, have improved social services in many countries.

13. Despite the broad record of social progress in the region, large numbers of people in several developing countries continue to face problems, such as poor nutrition and health, lack of education and training, chronic unemployment and underemployment, inadequate shelter, environmental degradation, natural disasters, crime, lack of social protection and family disintegration. 1/ It is estimated that 800 million people described as the absolute poor (approximately three quarters of the world's total) live in the region, illustrating the magnitude of the region's problem, despite its economic growth record.

14. To address critical social problems, the Commission, at its forty-eighth session (April 1992), adopted the regional Social Development Strategy. 2/ That Strategy adopted a multisectoral, integrated approach to social development policy and planning, aimed at the core objectives of poverty eradication, popular participation and enhancement of distributive equity. In pursuance of those objectives, social concerns have increasingly been given equal importance with economic concerns in national development policy and planning initiatives, with some countries increasing budgetary allocations for social development commensurately. In accordance with the Strategy, some countries have started to shift away from the setting of broad, indicative goals towards the setting of specific, time-bound targets for clearly defined groups and social issues.

15. This process was further enhanced at the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference in Preparation for the World Summit for Social Development (Manila, October 1994), resulting in the adoption of a regional Agenda for Action on Social Development. 3/ Building upon the Social Development Strategy, the Agenda affirmed the commitment of the Governments of the region to a series of specific social development goals and targets.

16. In support of the Strategy and the Agenda and in line with the secretariat's programme on poverty alleviation through economic growth and social development, the Commission secretariat has undertaken the following major activities:

(a) Assistance to Governments to plan and deliver social services;

(b) Convening of a symposium for non-governmental organizations to consider an agenda for social development for the region into the twenty-first century, in collaboration with the International Council on Social Welfare and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies;

(c) Holding of an expert group meeting on regional preparations for the World Summit for Social Development, to assist in preparing the draft regional social development agenda;

(d) Preparation of documents for the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference in Preparation for the World Summit for Social Development; 4/

(e) Preparation and dissemination of a number of publications; 5/

(f) Publication of two issues of the Social Development Newsletter, one focusing on the outcome of the fiftieth session of the Commission and the other on ESCAP's preparations for the World Summit for Social Development;

(g) Work on a series of studies on the enhancement of social protection for the poor in the region and on the role of non-governmental organizations in implementing the regional social development agenda.

B. Youth

17. As part of the observance of International Youth Year, the secretariat initiated a number of youth development activities. Undertaken as part of the Commission's human resources development programme, the activities contribute to poverty alleviation, principally by focusing on programmes to enhance the productive capabilities of young people.

18. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/85 and in order to take stock of the youth situation in the region, the secretariat undertook a comprehensive review of youth policies and programmes. It also initiated a series of national and subregional training workshops for youth workers, with particular focus on strengthening entrepreneurial skills for establishing and operating micro-level enterprises. Another major activity aims to strengthen youth organizations in order to promote functional literacy, especially among

girls and young women. Using a curriculum for national- and local-level training programmes developed at the South Asian Workshop for the Training of Trainers for the Promotion of Functional Literacy among Girls and Young Women, the secretariat is conducting a series of workshops for youth trainers in five South Asian countries.

19. The secretariat plans a regional youth meeting in 1995 to commemorate both the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year and the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. The theme for the 1995 ESCAP HRD Award, which encourages exemplary research and innovative achievement in the field of human resources development and will be administered subject to availability of funding, will be youth employment. Established in 1990, the Award takes the form of a monetary prize and a research grant awarded by an independent international jury composed of three regional experts in the field of human resources development. The jury will review the nominations and make its final selection at the end of February 1995. More than 40 applications from 16 countries were received.

20. The secretariat provides advisory services to member and associate member Governments on crime prevention and criminal justice. The services assist Governments to upgrade prison administration, focusing on classification systems to separate youth offenders from hardened criminals and dealing with problems of overcrowding and lack of facilities. Assistance is provided to juvenile justice administration systems for taking a more pro-active approach and improving methodology for data collection on crime and related issues. In cooperation with the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, the secretariat organized a regional seminar on programmes to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents. It was attended by policy makers, programme personnel and researchers from 14 countries and territories in the region.

21. Two publications on juvenile delinquency were recently issued: Rehabilitation of Juvenile Delinquents in the ESCAP Region and Implementation of United Nations Mandates on Juvenile Justice Administration in the ESCAP Region, with a Focus on Youth in Poverty. The development of a regional project on community programmes for the prevention of juvenile delinquency is under way. The project will, inter alia, focus on young offenders who have engaged in violence and property-related transgressions, gang activity, sexual abuse, prostitution and drug abuse, including alcohol abuse.

C. Ageing

22. The rapid ageing of societies in much of the region has raised concern about the need for preemptive policy and programme measures to facilitate individual, family, community and societal adaptation to the unprecedented numbers of elderly persons and their unprecedented longevity as a social group.

23. Recent activities include assisting member Governments to address issues pertaining to the ageing of populations, support for training on field-work research methods on ageing, substantive contributions to a regional workshop for policy makers on social services for older persons, and assistance to non-governmental organizations on survey work and the development of action

plans on ageing issues. Issues concerning older persons continue to be reported by Population Headliners and the Asia-Pacific Population Journal. In support of the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in September 1994, the secretariat produced several publications. 6/

24. The secretariat is implementing two related projects: the first pertains to local-level policy development to address the consequences of population ageing; and the second supports the development of comprehensive national policies on ageing. Studies on local-level policy development in six countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and Viet Nam) and a publication on productive ageing have been issued. Preparations are in progress to convene a regional meeting to discuss the policy implications of the studies. Five country studies, undertaken in the context of the project on comprehensive policies on ageing, are at various stages of completion. National workshops will consider the results of the studies and recommend policies for life-long preparation for old age. An annotated bibliography on ageing issues in the region will be published. Two meetings will be convened to develop and finalize guidelines for national policies on ageing.

D. Disabled persons

25. After proclamation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, by the Commission at its forty-eighth session in 1992, the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Decade is well under way. Thirty Governments have joined as signatories to the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region. Governments have shown considerable interest in developing legislation to support the equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities. New approaches are being explored to integrate the concerns of disabled persons into the programmes of Governments and non-governmental organizations in diverse fields of development. Attention is being drawn to the urgent need for measures to alleviate poverty among people with disabilities, placing emphasis on those in rural areas. The establishment and strengthening of self-help organizations of people with disabilities are being actively pursued by the secretariat.

26. The Commission's programme in support of national action focuses on advisory services to implement the Agenda for Action; efforts to develop and strengthen self-help organizations of people with disabilities; promotion of barrier-free built environments to facilitate economic participation and social integration; and initiation of regional exchange on the indigenous production and distribution of assisting devices. Subregional training workshops on management have been conducted for self-help organizations of people with disabilities of South, East and South-East Asia. Surveys have been conducted and meetings convened to develop guidelines for the promotion of non-handicapping physical environments. Seed money from a technical cooperation trust fund for Decade activities is being allocated to non-governmental organizations, including self-help organizations of people with disabilities. The membership and activities of the Asia-Pacific Inter-organizational Task Force on Disability-related Concerns, for which the Commission serves as secretariat, have been expanded. Recent publications include: Directory of

Self-help Organizations of People with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific; Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002: The Starting Point; and Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002: Mandates for Action. Translation into major languages of the region of the Agenda for Action and the Directory is in progress. Braille versions of both publications were prepared and disseminated.

E. Human resources development

27. Despite the region's record of economic growth during the past three decades, much of its vast human resources remain largely untapped. This is partly attributable to the continuing prevalence of poverty in many of the region's developing countries, which has had a severe impact on human resources development. In South Asia, where poverty is most severe, nutritional levels, health status, literacy rates and school enrolment ratios continue to be disappointingly low. Access to educational opportunities differs between rich and poor, men and women, and the rural and urban sectors. Equally worrisome is the quality of education and the capacity of educational systems, both formal and non-formal, to provide the skills needed to utilize economic opportunities fully. Because education systems have had difficulty in responding to changing circumstances, open unemployment and underemployment are major problems in many countries and represent a significant waste of human resources.

28. At its fiftieth session, the Commission established as the theme topic for its fifty-first session, to be held in April 1995, "Strengthening regional cooperation in human resources development, with special reference to the social implications of sustainable economic growth in Asia and the Pacific". The secretariat is conducting a study on this topic for the fifty-first session. The study will examine the relations between human resources development, economic growth and social progress. It will review the existing human resources development endowment of the region and the challenges which it will face, identifying areas and modalities for regional cooperation. To prepare the study, the secretariat convened a Panel of Eminent Persons on Human Resources Development at Bangkok on 24 and 25 November 1994.

29. Since the adoption in 1988 of Commission resolution 274 (XLIV) on the Jakarta Plan of Action for Human Resources Development in the ESCAP Region, the region has experienced far-reaching changes, politically, economically and socially. In 1992, the Commission, in its resolution 48/6, requested the secretariat to revise the Plan to ensure its continued relevance in the face of changing conditions. The Expert Group Meeting to Review the Jakarta Plan of Action for Human Resources Development in the ESCAP Region was held at Bangkok in January 1994. Following the Meeting, the revised Plan was adopted by the Commission in resolution 50/7, entitled "Update of the Jakarta Plan of Action on Human Resources Development in the ESCAP Region".

30. The Jakarta Plan of Action emphasizes the contributions of non-governmental organizations in promoting human resources development. To assist their contributions, a study on fiscal incentives to support the growth and viability of non-governmental organizations was published. A study on registration procedures for non-governmental organizations is in preparation, while a

compendium of successful approaches to the planning and delivery of social services will be published. Preparations are under way for a regional training workshop on cooperation between governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations in the planning and delivery of social services to the poor.

31. The secretariat has also been identifying policy research institutes involved in multidisciplinary development in order to construct a register of centres of excellence, as preliminary work for a proposed project to strengthen regional cooperation for human resources development. Preparations are under way to organize, in collaboration with UNESCO, a regional workshop on distance education as an aspect of human resources development.

32. A regional workshop to promote the contributions of the private sector to human resources development was held in cooperation with the Population and Community Development Association in Thailand. Innovative approaches were explored at that workshop to promote involvement by the private sector in the poverty alleviation programmes of non-governmental organizations, in order to extend their coverage to other countries of the region.

III. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

A. Social development and welfare

33. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/92 relating to the World Summit for Social Development, the Commission carried out a number of preparatory activities during 1993-1994 and participated in other activities organized by Governments or non-governmental organizations. As a substantive contribution to the Social Summit, it prepared, on the basis of its proposal on changing production patterns with social equity, a paper entitled "The Social Summit: a view from Latin America and the Caribbean" (LC/G.1802(SES.25/5)), which was endorsed by the region's Governments at the Commission's twenty-fifth session (Cartagena, Colombia, April 1994). The paper contains analyses and proposed guidelines on the three core issues of the Summit, taking an integrated approach that sees growth and equity as complementary goals that should be sought simultaneously. The secretariat provided support for the preparation of the Guidelines for a Latin American and Caribbean Consensus on the World Summit for Social Development, approved at the twenty-fifth session of the Commission.

34. During the past two years, the Governments of the region have attached increasing importance to studying the characteristics and trends of poverty and to policies for overcoming it. One example of their concern was the consolidation of an intergovernmental mechanism for regional cooperation, the Regional Conference on Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, as a high-level forum for discussing issues and exchanging national experiences in combating poverty. ECLAC, as the permanent secretariat of the Conference, is charged with substantive and organizational tasks.

35. Accordingly, the Social Development Division participated in the Conference on Social Development and Poverty (Oaxaca, Mexico, 8-11 September 1993). The Conference was organized by the Government of Mexico, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. The Division's

participation focused on policies for social participation and community organization and, more specifically, institutional coordination in applying public social policies.

36. The Social Development, Statistical and Economic Development Divisions of ECLAC prepared and published the 1993 and 1994 editions of "Panorama social de América Latina" (LC/G.1768 and LC/G.1844). The two studies describe recent social trends in the region, based on information from household surveys. Some aspects considered in detail are employment trends, the ways in which risk factors operate under conditions of poverty, the impact of those factors on youth, and the effect of family organization on children's educational performance. This publication has been accorded high priority as a result of the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government (Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, July 1993), which stressed the need for countries to have relevant social indicators at their disposal as soon as possible. The 1994 edition of "Panorama" includes a special section on social spending.

37. A new series of publications on social policies was launched. It will serve as a channel for the exchange and dissemination of information and experiences. To date, six studies on policies relating to health, education, housing and social spending have been published. Two seminars were held: one on post-graduate training in social policies, with the participation of universities from several countries (Santiago, Chile, 13-14 December 1993), and the other on the management and evaluation of social policies and projects, an area on which the Division will concentrate a significant part of its future efforts (Santiago, Chile, 14-16 December 1993). Finally, the Workshop on Citizen Participation and Social Movements in Latin American Capital Cities was held jointly with the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and the Office of the Under-Secretary for Regional and Administrative Development of the Ministry of the Interior of Chile (Santiago, Chile, 13 December 1993). The secretariat also convened the Fourth Informal Inter-agency Meeting on Integrated Social Policies (Cartagena, Colombia, April 1994) to discuss the Social Summit and promote communications and joint actions.

38. Another significant area of work was the execution of specific technical cooperation projects. In December 1994, a regional workshop was held at Santiago, Chile, on indicators for the formulation of social policies, as the culminating activity of a joint project of the Social Development, Statistics and Projections Divisions, supported by the Government of the Netherlands. Discussion focused on the elaboration of social indicators with a view to formulating more appropriate social policies to enhance the situation of the most disadvantaged population groups.

39. The Social Development Division and the Division of Production, Productivity and Management carried out another project, in conjunction with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), to develop an inter-agency proposal on health in the process of changing production patterns with social equity. The proposal was discussed by Governments, and the publication of a book on health policy is expected to result. Also, in cooperation with the Organization of American States (OAS), the Joint Programme on Social Policies for Latin America (PROPOSAL) is being carried out to support the efforts of Governments to promote social development by providing technical assistance and training in the

formulation and evaluation of social projects. Within its framework, a workshop on financial alternatives for programmes for overcoming poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean was held (Santiago, Chile, June 1994), and several national courses were given. Finally, two international courses were held to strengthen the process of "training the trainers" in the design and evaluation of social policies and projects.

B. Youth

40. In the field of youth, the Commission's activities for the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year are concentrated in two areas: policy-oriented research, and the promotion of inter-agency cooperation. One major research event was the Expert Seminar on Rural Youth in Latin America (Santiago, Chile, October 1993). The Social Development Division also participated in international meetings on rural youth policy. Furthermore, in 1994 it carried out a study of equal opportunity in secondary education and employment for youth and young adults in Chile. In the area of inter-agency cooperation, the Division prepared the Conceptual Framework for a Regional Programme of Action for Youth Development and convened an expert group meeting, in conjunction with the Iberoamerican Youth Organization, to discuss the Framework (Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, November 1993). The Conceptual Framework was approved by the Seventh Iberoamerican Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (April 1994). The Division also performed various tasks in its capacity as regional focal point for youth and social policy activities in the United Nations system, such as holding the Informal Inter-agency Meeting on Youth (Montevideo, April 1994).

C. Ageing

41. In the field of ageing, the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE) of ECLAC continued to collaborate during 1993-1994 with the Instituto Nacional de Seguridad Social, Jubilados y Pensionados (INSSJP) of Argentina. Once a study on the socio-organizational participation modalities of the elderly was concluded, support was provided for identifying self-sustaining programme activities in such areas as health and recreation. Collaboration was also provided in searching for motivation mechanisms to increase the participation of older persons in the senior citizen centres of Buenos Aires. The Ministerio de Planificación y Coordinación Internacional of Chile made known its policy guidelines on the elderly in 1993, based in part on suggestions for action provided by the centres. Communication was maintained with public agencies in Peru for the purpose of advancing the study of the elderly. To that end, the desirability of utilizing fully and systematically the information provided in the last population census (1992) was suggested.

42. As a follow-up to the Workshop on Policies Aimed at the Elderly (Santiago, Chile, November 1992) information on the socio-demographic characteristics of older persons was expanded, broken down according to gender, and presented at a workshop on policies on caring for the elderly. A document reflecting the consensus reached during the workshop was published and widely disseminated through PAHO. The report of the workshop contains summaries of the papers

presented and syntheses of the daily debates as well as the conclusions of the discussions carried out in each of the working groups. One of the papers submitted by CELADE to the Workshop has been updated and expanded. The new version, which will be circulated as a CELADE working paper, summarizes socio-economic trends concerning older persons, placing emphasis on gender.

D. Disabled persons

43. The Commission, through its Division of Statistics and Projections, participated in the expert group meeting on the development of statistics on the disabled, and in the 3rd meeting for the revision of the International Classification of Impediments, Disabilities and Handicaps (The Hague, November 1994).

E. Family

44. The Division played a key role in preparations for the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting Preparatory to the International Year of the Family. Its activities included preparing a discussion paper on the situation of the family in the region (LC/L.758(CONF.84/3)), compiling a compendium of Governments' replies to a survey on the family (LC/L.756(CONF.84/4)), and publishing a book on the changes that have affected families in the region during the past three decades (LC/G1761-P). The Social Development Division held a regional preparatory meeting for the International Year of the Family (Cartagena, Colombia, August 1993). As a follow-up to that meeting, a book entitled Family and Future: a Regional Programme in Latin America and the Caribbean was published in 1994, and an expert group prepared a body of social statistical indicators on the situation of families in the region.

IV. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

A. Social development and welfare

45. The 1990s have brought little improvement in the social situation in the African region. According to Human Development Report, 1994, 7/ countries with a human development index (HDI) value below 0.5 are considered to have a low level of human development. Approximately 40 countries in sub-Saharan Africa fall into this category, indicating the persistent low levels in the three basic components of human development - namely, life expectancy, educational attainment, and income. The 1994 ECA "Economic report" confirms the continued deterioration in social and human conditions and the escalating absolute and relative poverty by pointing out that about 220 million Africans - almost half of the population in sub-Saharan Africa - now live in absolute poverty, unable to meet their most basic needs.

46. Unemployment and underemployment, a major contributor to high levels of poverty, has continued to be one of the major problems facing most African countries, and it is a key issue in the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa, 8/ Africa's policy contribution to the World

Summit for Social Development. Africa's current demographic profile is characterized by a high population growth rate of 3 per cent per annum; high fertility levels, ranging from 6 to 8.5 children per woman; high infant mortality rates of 103 per 1,000 births, and high maternal mortality rates of 650 per 100,000 births. The meagre resource allocations to the health sector are directed largely towards curative rather than preventive efforts. The continued spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, compounded by the resurgence of previously controlled diseases such as tuberculosis, continues to exacerbate the health situation in the region.

47. The education sector, one of the key elements in the human development index, is still plagued by declining gross enrolment ratios, high dropout and attrition rates, and an overall decline in quality at all levels. The low level of public expenditure on the education sector, on the one hand, and the rapid increase in the school-going population in most African countries, on the other, have had a negative impact on the growth and development of the sector. In spite of some notable progress in democratization and popular participation in some African countries, a number of others remain embroiled in ethnic conflicts, political upheavals and civil wars which have resulted in a humanitarian tragedy of unprecedented proportions.

48. The Commission has continued to monitor the social situation in the region as part of its overall efforts to promote socio-economic development. In this connection, a chapter on the social situation in the region was incorporated in the 1993 and 1994 ECA "Economic reports on Africa". 9/ A survey of social trends in the African region was included in the "Survey of the economic and social conditions in Africa, 1992-1993" (E/1993/53), which analyses major economic and social issues in the region and their development implications. A study entitled "The implications of differential access to education among males and females in Africa: an agenda for the 1990s" addresses the issue of differential access to education and its implications for regional development.

49. The secretariat continued to provide both technical and substantive contributions and support to the two institutions dealing with social development issues - the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development (ACARTSOD) and the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI). ECA participated in the meetings of the Governing Boards of the two institutions and continued to mobilize resources, especially from the United Nations Development Programme. It participated in the African Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (Kampala, Uganda, 14-18 February 1994). It also made substantive contributions to the joint Meeting of the African Ministers of the Interior and of Justice, held simultaneously with the Regional Preparatory Meeting.

B. Youth

50. Young people (between 15 and 24 years of age) represent approximately 19 per cent of Africa's estimated 744 million inhabitants. Future projections indicate that the youth population will continue to grow and will represent a sizeable population group. Many of the current socio-economic issues affecting the region, such as unemployment, reduced public expenditures in education and health, rapid rural-to-urban migration, drug abuse and trafficking, delinquency, prostitution and the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, have much more significant effect on youth than on any other population group.

51. The ILO/JASPA African Employment Reports (1992, 1993) indicate that youth constitute 60-75 per cent of all unemployed people in African countries, although they represent only a third of the total labour force. Because of limited opportunities for higher education, about 90 per cent of school leavers are forced to enter the labour market each year, and each year the youth population accounts for over 75 per cent of the new entrants into the African labour market. It is also youth and young adults, traditionally one of the most productive sectors of the labour force, who are most affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

52. The secretariat prepared a report entitled "The role and contribution of youth to the conservation of the African environment. It found that among young people, awareness of environmental problems such as deforestation, pollution and desertification and involvement in activities such as water and soil management were marginal in most countries, although they varied from country to country. Although some countries had undertaken activities to implement Agenda 21, much more deliberate and sustained action was required in order to mobilize young people effectively for the conservation of the African environment.

53. A secretariat report entitled "The administration of juvenile justice in eastern and southern Africa" highlights reform strategies such as improvement of court procedures for juveniles, training of personnel in the administration of juvenile justice, implementation of effective policies and programmes based on reliable research and incorporation of criminology in university curricula.

54. Another secretariat report, entitled "The impact of the African socio-economic crisis on youth, drugs and health", served as one of the working documents for the National Seminar on Youth, Drugs and Health, held in Ethiopia and organized jointly by ECA and the Government of Ethiopia. The seminar covered a wide range of issues, such as the dangers of drug abuse; the interlinkages between drugs and health as they affect young people; drug control activities; the treatment and rehabilitation of young drug addicts; national policies and measures for the prevention and control of illicit drug trafficking and drug abuse by young people.

55. In addition, the Directory on Youth Organizations in African Countries was prepared and circulated. It provides information on youth organizations, their objectives, structures, activities and achievements.

C. Ageing

56. Older persons, although one of the most vulnerable groups, constitute the smallest population group in the region. Social services and care for them are mostly provided within the context of the extended family system. Demographically, therefore, the ageing of the population does not as yet pose a major challenge.

57. Recent social and economic developments, however, point to the need to give more attention to older persons. The growing rural-to-urban migration, especially of able-bodied members of families and communities, the losses attributable to ethnic conflict and civil war and the HIV/AIDS phenomenon have combined to place a heavy burden of farm and domestic responsibilities on older persons in many countries.

58. The secretariat completed a study entitled "The social and economic situation of the ageing in West Africa", focusing on such issues as the demographic features of older persons, policies and programmes relating to their education and training, employment, social security, health and nutrition, and housing, and older persons in the context of the family and the community.

D. Disabled persons

59. Even though reliable statistics on the exact numbers of disabled persons in the region have yet to be compiled, indications are that in recent years cases of disability have increased dramatically in a number of African countries as a result of natural disasters, protracted internal armed conflict, famine and malnutrition, and the resurgence of once-controlled diseases such as tuberculosis.

60. Because of limited resources within the secretariat, activities in the field of disability were limited to the publication and circulation of a newsletter, Equal Time, in which a number of activities undertaken by and for disabled persons were highlighted.

E. Family

61. As part of its contribution to the International Year of the Family and in efforts to bring the issues affecting African families into greater focus, the secretariat prepared a document on how the economic and social crises of the 1980s affected African families and, in some cases, necessitated modifications in their structures, functions and roles.

62. The secretariat convened an ad hoc expert group meeting on the impact of economic and social changes on the African family. The meeting drew participants from a number of African countries, representing Governments, non-governmental organizations, universities and training institutions. Issues examined by the expert meeting included the structures, functions and roles of the family and how those have been affected by economic and social change; structural adjustment programmes and the family; unemployment, household income

and family coping strategies; socio-cultural changes and their impacts on the family; demographic trends and the family; health and the family, with emphasis on the HIV/AIDS pandemic; war, political conflict and instability and their impact on the family, including displaced and refugee families; and the changing status of women and their role in the family.

63. The secretariat also participated in the African/Western Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family (Tunis, 29 March-2 April 1993). The report on the impact of economic and social changes on the African family was one of the major working documents for the regional meeting.

V. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

A. Social development and welfare

64. During the past few decades, the countries of the region have made significant progress in social development. In certain social indicators, the positive change has taken place much faster than in the rest of the world. This has been the case with regard to life expectancy (63.6 years in 1990-1995 compared to 53.1 years in 1970-1975), 10/ infant mortality (56 per thousand in 1990-1995 compared to 125 per thousand in 1970-1975), access to education, and daily per capita calorie supply. Nevertheless, a substantial number of people in the region still live below the poverty line (e.g., 34 per cent in Egypt in 1990 and 14.5 per cent in Jordan in 1994), 11/ and nearly half of its people are illiterate. High population growth (2.70 per cent in 1990-1995) accompanied by low economic development is characteristic of almost all countries of the region.

65. Unemployment is very high in the region. The unemployment rate at the Arab regional level is estimated to be 17 per cent of its total active population. The rate would be even higher if those workers who are underemployed were included. Apart from the magnitude of current unemployment, many Arab youth and new school graduates are not provided with employment opportunities appropriate to their levels of skill and educational attainment.

66. The regional population is currently estimated to be approximately 141 million people. This figure is expected to exceed 278 million people by the year 2025, at which time 50 per cent of the total population will be under the age of 25 years. The largest concentrations of population are found in countries that have the fewest means to ensure sustainable development - that is, sufficient food, water, health and education plus sufficient work opportunities. The participation of Arab women in development is still limited. For instance, the percentage of women enrolled in secondary school is still much lower than that of men in all countries, with the exception of a few countries of the Persian Gulf - for example, the United Arab Emirates. 12/ Per capita GNPs reveal great economic disparities among the countries of the region. In 1991, the GNP per capita of the least developed country (Yemen) was only $520, while that of the United Arab Emirates was $19,860.

67. Regardless of the level of development, economic growth has received priority in the developmental policies and concerns of the respective

Governments. The pertinence of social development is indicated not only by the rankings of the countries of the region on the UNDP Human Development Index but also by the gaps among countries. As Human Development Report, 1994 shows, only one ESCWA country (Kuwait) falls into the "high human development" category; there were 10 countries of "medium human development" (five in the upper half of the category and five in the lower half); and one country fell into the category of "low human development". 7/ This diversity calls into question the validity or success of efforts for social development in the region in the past few decades.

68. Under the circumstances, it was felt that a reordering of social priorities in the region, including an attempt to give greater emphasis to the human dimensions of development in their various aspects, was required. Hence, a shift of priority was undertaken within the framework of the new ESCWA organizational structure, and the Section on Human Development was established within the Social Development Issues and Policies Division. The new section covers social development and welfare issues.

69. Special attention has also been given, during the past two years, to preparatory activities for the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, the International Year of the Family and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), in addition to rural development operational projects.

70. Two meetings were held in order to develop a unified human development policy at the regional level: a meeting on human development in the Arab world was organized jointly by the Commission secretariat, UNDP and the League of Arab States (Cairo, December 1993), and a brainstorming meeting on a strategy for sustainable human development in the Arab world was organized, in collaboration with UNDP (Tangier, Morocco, 7-10 July 1994).

71. At the expert group meeting on the preparations for the World Summit for Social Development (Amman, 19-22 September 1994), the three core issues of the Summit were discussed, in addition to a fourth issue, introduced at the initiative of the Commission, on the cultural aspect of development. Based on the recommendations of the meeting, a draft Arab declaration for social development (a unified Arab approach to social development) was prepared. It was agreed that the draft declaration should be sent to Member States for use in the preparation of their country papers to be presented to the World Summit, as they deemed appropriate.

72. The secretariat and the United Nations Office at Vienna jointly organized the Western Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (Amman, 20-24 March 1994). The final report, including a set of concrete regional recommendations, was issued as a contribution to the Congress. The recommendations covered several key issues, including the importance of crime prevention and criminal justice, individual and collective security and safety measures in Islamic society, the impact of transnational crime (such as organized crime and illicit drug trafficking) in the region, and future measures concerning regional and international collaboration against crime.

73. The Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women, on the theme: "Peace for the advancement of Arab women", was organized in collaboration with the League of Arab States, the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and the Jordanian National Committee for Women (Amman, 6-10 November 1994). At the Meeting the Regional Plan of Action for the Advancement of Arab Women to the Year 2005 was drawn up.

74. The secretariat collaborated in the organization of two Arab regional preparatory meetings for Habitat II (Amman, March 1994; and Abu Dhabi, October 1994). It also organized, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, a regional expert meeting in preparation for Habitat II (23-26 January 1995). The meeting reviewed urbanization, housing and human settlements policies in the Arab world. It also drafted an Arab declaration on sustainable human settlements (which will be a contribution to the global plan of action) for consideration by a third Arab preparatory meeting, to be held in October 1995, and later by the Council of Arab Ministers for Housing and Reconstruction.

75. As the first operational project model to promote sustainable human development in the region, rural development projects in the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt were carried out during 1994. The projects are action-oriented and multidisciplinary in nature, promoting social integration of marginalized groups in rural communities, promoting income-generating activities and assisting in poverty eradication.

B. Ageing

76. The proportion of older persons in total national populations in countries of the region is currently very low. In 1995, 5.3 per cent of the population of the region is aged 60 years or more. However, some changes in the percentage are projected between 1995 and 2025. By 2025, 8.6 per cent of the population will be aged 60 years or more. Particularly in Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, relatively large national incomes generated by oil revenues, combined with rapid urbanization, high standards of living, improved health care and gradually declining fertility rates resulting in part from improved education of women, will produce drastic changes in the demographic structure, including the marked ageing trends which have been projected. In Egypt, the birth control measures that have been implemented by the Government will begin to take effect during the first quarter of the next century. Future policies must be formulated well in advance to respond to the projected increase in the numbers of older persons and to avoid a potentially negative impact on economies in the region.

77. In October 1993, the ESCWA Regional Expert Group Meeting on the Development of Policies and Programmes for the Elderly was held. The report of the Meeting emphasizes the developmental aspects of ageing populations and the role of the Arab family in providing care to older persons. Various conflicting issues, such as family care versus state services, the traditional Arab heritage of family integrity versus changing social values and the role of family versus gradual increases in Arab women's participation in the labour force, were discussed.

78. Furthermore, the demographic aspect of ageing and its economic implications were highlighted in the ESCWA Population Bulletin, 1994.

C. Disabled persons

79. The benefits of social progress have not spread evenly among the population of the region. The range of life options and the opportunities available have expanded, but mostly to limited segments of society. The majority of disabled persons in the region, particularly disabled women, do not enjoy equal access to the new options and benefits. The issue of disabled persons was considered a development issue, since the cost of disability is a significant burden to society. Also, disability can be the result of underdevelopment, as when, for example, there are insufficient health services. A technical study on the situation of women with disabilities, their social marginalization and measures for their integration in society was prepared. Two major sub-categories causing impairment in the region were identified: socio-economic and environmental factors, including medical aspects; and factors related to certain cultural values and social barriers. All of these factors are more significantly related to women and mothers.

D. Family

80. In Arab society the family constitutes one of the most important institutions in the chain of institutions responsible for social development. Yet the nature and functions of the family are changing in a rapid and unplanned fashion as a result of economic and technological developments. With respect to the delivery of social welfare services, two issues need urgent attention: first, the changing nature of the family affects the changing services which the family offers to its members, particularly those related to protection during times of unemployment or cases of disability, and financial security in old age. Further study is needed to determine ways to preserve family care services or arrange them in alternative ways which would allow them to be supplemented by state services. Secondly, the traditional role of women in the family is changing rapidly, with an increase in women's participation in the labour force. A "third choice" approach which harmonizes work and family obligations was suggested. It includes the introduction of part-time work, job-sharing, and the adaptation of job requirements to women's needs. This third choice approach is particularly appealing to many people in Arab society, because it maximizes family resources while maintaining traditional Arab family care.

81. As part of the activities related to the International Year of the Family, an expert group met to consider "The Arab family in changing societies: new concept for partnership" (Abu Dhabi, 10-14 December 1994).

82. A seminar on the role of the family in integrating disabled women was held at Amman from 16 to 18 October 1994. The causes of disability and the problems of disabled women were discussed by the participants. The role of the Arab family in taking care of disabled members was emphasized. The importance of involving the entire family was also emphasized, to avoid placing the sole responsibility and entire burden of family care on the mother. It is the

responsibility of the family, with the proper support from specialists, to help disabled persons make the most of their abilities. Also, the role of the family, particularly that of mothers, was stressed in terms of prevention, early detection and rehabilitation of childhood disability.

Notes

1/ That mixed record is elaborated upon in "Quality of life in the ESCAP region" (ST/ESCAP/1462).

2/ "Social Development Strategy for the ESCAP Region Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond" (ST/ESCAP/1124).

3/ See "Manila Declaration on the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region" (ST/ESCAP/1464).

4/ "Quality of life in the ESCAP region", "Major issues concerning poverty alleviation in the ESCAP region", "Major issues concerning social integration in the ESCAP region", "Progress achieved towards attaining the objectives of the Social Development Strategy for the ESCAP Region Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond", "International support measures for promoting social development in the ESCAP region", and "Draft social development agenda for the ESCAP region into the twenty-first century".

5/ Manila Declaration on the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, Compendium of Social Development Indicators in the ESCAP Region, Quality of Life in the ESCAP Region, Asian and Pacific Success Stories in Social Development, and Community-based Drug Demand Reduction and HIV/AIDS Prevention.

6/ Bali Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development; Report of the Fourth Asian and Pacific Population Conference; Fourth Asian and Pacific Population Conference: Selected Papers; Targets and Goals of the Bali Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development: Implementation Strategy.

7/ New York, Oxford University Press, 1994.

8/ In its resolution 1993/64 of 30 July 1993, the Economic and Social Council decided that an African common position on the issues before the World Summit for Social Development should be formulated by the meeting of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Human Development. The first meeting of the Conference was held at Addis Ababa on 20 and 21 January 1994, and the African Common Position on Human and Social Development was submitted to the Preparatory Committee for the Summit at its first substantive session (A/CONF.166/PC/10).

9/ E/ECA/CM.19/3 and E/ECA/CM.20/2.

10/ All statistical data were taken from World Population Prospects: The 1992 Revision (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.1993.XIII.11), unless otherwise indicated.

11/ Government of Egypt, Human Development Report, 1994 (Cairo, 1994); Government of Jordan, Social Development in Jordan, 1994 (Amman, 1994).

12/ The State of the World's Children, 1994 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994).